



NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Police Remind Citizens Not to Leave Valuables in Cars *Increase in Vehicle Break-Ins Prompts Safety Message*

After a recent increase in vehicle break-ins around Howard County, police are reminding citizens not to leave valuable property inside their cars.

“While we are working to identify and arrest the various people responsible for these crimes, we are asking citizens to make their cars less appealing to thieves,” said Police Chief William J. McMahon. “Having valuables in plain view inside a vehicle makes it an attractive target for criminals.”

Since the beginning of the year, police have seen a 40 percent increase in thefts from vehicles. Thieves are breaking into cars to steal GPS units, laptop computers, stereos, iPods, purses, briefcases, cash and other property.

So far this year, the department has received 2,519 reports of thefts from vehicles. There were 1,800 reports during the same time period in 2007.

Investigators have seen the trend occurring in neighborhoods throughout the county and have already made arrests in cases in Elkridge, Columbia, Ellicott City and North Laurel. Police have assigned special squads to combat the issue, both undercover and in marked police cars, and have conducted crime prevention meetings and notifications by phone through the county’s automated Community Notification System. But the thefts are continuing, partly because the valuables are readily available to thieves.

“The police department has taken great effort to investigate and solve these cases, but they need the public’s help in preventing these crimes from happening in the first place,” said County Executive Ken Ulman. “It will take a real partnership between law enforcement and citizens to stop this rising trend, but I believe that partnership exists.”

Police are urging citizens to take valuables indoors whenever possible or to lock property in the trunk of the vehicle. Citizens also are reminded to always keep their vehicles locked. If possible, drivers should park cars in well-lit areas or locked garages.

Police also encourage citizens to maintain a record of serial numbers for their property and to engrave items with identifying information. These measures increase the likelihood of getting property returned if it is stolen.

“Let’s make it harder for the criminals,” said Chief McMahon. “If we all are vigilant about protecting our property, our community will be less attractive and less susceptible to thieves.”

Anyone with information about these crimes should call police at 410-313-3200.

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